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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN POLITICS III #14: POLITICAL PRIMARY  
CALENDAR & PROSPECTS

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 0076

Classified By: Economic-Political Counselor Michael A. Meigs, Reasons 1  
.4(b), (d)

11. This is the fourteenth cable in our series on Dominican  
politics in the third year of the administration of President  
Leonel Fernandez.

THE DOMINICAN POLITICAL PRIMARY SEASON AND PROSPECTS

(SBU) Primaries of the three major Dominican political  
parties are approaching. The PRD,s Miguel Vargas Maldonado  
will win on January 28, while on April 15 Leonel Fernandez is  
likely to win the PLD nomination, assuming that he decides to  
run. In the retrograde PRSC Amable Aristy Castro and Luis  
Toral will face off, probably in April.

(U) The primaries offer a carnival of entertainments for  
early 2007, after which the major contenders will have a full  
year's slog before the 2008 presidential elections.

PRD - "Miguelito" and "dona Milagros," January 28

(SBU) Miguel Vargas Maldonado appears to have had the PRD  
nominations wrapped up for several months. He and his  
supporters have dealt gently with the pushy old perpetual  
candidates of the party, known for a time as the "Corriente  
Unitaria" (Unitary Movement), with the gentle intermediation  
of party Secretary General Orlando Jorge Mera. The party  
convention - -in fact, a national vote rather than a  
gathering - - has been pushed back from November to January 7  
to January 28. Part of the problem was finances; organizers  
reluctantly turned down an offer from Vargas Maldonado to

foot much of the expense and turned to a loan from an indulgent commercial bank, instead.

(C) Milagros Ortiz Bosch, former vice president and former education minister, is the consensus candidate of the Corriente Unitaria. Much loved but undeniably ditzy, dona Milagros is 70 years old and has no program to speak of. She offers pious generalities to journalists and attends some party functions, but she was conspicuously absent during the meetings of the PRD Political Committee in January as it was setting election dates. Instead, she sent a letter via a bailiff demanding a strict review of the PRD voting rolls, including a cross-check with party registrations of the ruling PRD. She appears often with equally aged would-be candidate Rafael Abinader.

(SBU) Vargas Maldonado sponsored in yesterday's afternoon tabloid "El Nacional" a two-page spread of happy crowds of his supporters, citing polling results from 6 firms, some of them reputable. They showed preferences for Vargas Maldonado over Ortiz Bosch ranging from 57 percent (Gallup, as well as Hamilton) to 90.6 percent (a telephone poll). And for good measure, he included a poll done by the thoroughly unscientific but very popular morning radio show, "El Gobierno de la Maana," showing Vargas Maldonado outpolling President Fernandez 51.4 percent to 48.6 percent.

(SBU) Result expected: a strong win by Vargas Maldonado.

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PLD - Danilo Medina, Jose Tomas Perez, an undeclared Leonel Fernandez, April 15  
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(SBU) In full campaign mode since mid-December, Danilo Medina told a television interviewer yesterday that the four-person commission from the PLD Central Committee, after consultations with probable candidates, has selected April 15 as the date for PLD's vote on political candidacies.

(SBU) Medina's decision to contest the nomination has stirred up the PLD, making manifest the strong support that he enjoys in Congress and among senior PLD leaders. He has chosen to campaign not against Fernandez but rather against the concept of "re-electionism," asserting that from the party's very beginnings it has been opposed to "continuism." He and supporters use a peculiar salute to signify the concept: a raised hand with thumb and index finger together to form an "O" or "zero." Medina asserts that the PLD is strong enough to confront the choice and expects that after the vote, "We will all dust ourselves off and go out to win the presidential election." He exudes confidence.

(SBU) Former senator Jose Tomas Perez declared himself a candidate last October, but his narrow base in Santo Domingo will probably not get him past an earlier first round in which candidates will have to gather at least a third of the 400-member Central Committee in order to get to the general vote.

(C) Leonel Fernandez has been canny about his own putative candidacy, so far limiting himself to enigmatic remarks such as the much-quoted spontaneous comment in a provincial rally, "When the time comes, the lion will roar." He continues his familiar, non-controversial presidency, appearing at inauguration ceremonies, distributing toys to tots, congratulating students and receiving visitors. He has not engaged in controversy or exerted much leadership. Journalists made much of his passing comment in December that he "never sought out a position of leadership." He has been avoiding spontaneous interchanges with the press since then. For example, when he returned from the Ortega inauguration late at night last weekend, he disappointed the press stakeout by saying nothing as he departed the airplane.

(SBU) Fernandez is nonetheless the most admired public figure, according to the polls, even if the percentages have

slipped somewhat in recent months. His disengagement with the upper ranks of his own party does not help him, but he can still expect strong support from the newly created mass base of the PLD. He will probably take on Danilo Medina, cordially explaining why his own vision will be better for the party and the country, and he will probably win.

(C) The outside possibility remains that he might decide that his books, his think tank and the international lecture circuit are more interesting than politics.

(SBU) Result expected: a Fernandez win, by majority vote, and a quick Medina concession.

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PRSC - a Threesome Contending to Trail in the 2008 Elections  
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(SBU) The "reformistas" have not yet reassembled themselves from the triple catastrophes of the death of former president Balaguer, the humiliating 8.65 percent loss of Eduardo Estrella in the 2004 presidential election, and the debacle of the PRSC-PRD alliance for the 2006 congressional and municipal elections. They have not yet set the date of their selection of a presidential candidate, but April appears to be a likely season.

- - (SBU) Amable Aristy Castro, baron of the easternmost province of Altagracia, is an unusual, uncommunicative figure and he may for that very reason see himself as an heir to Joaquin Balaguer. He has run the League of Municipalities (LMD) for the past eight years, channeling central government funds to municipalities across the country, and this enormous source of patronage has given him power and, apparently, pleasure. His province elected him as its senator for the third time in 2006 and, as before, he eventually withdrew and had the party name a replacement. Amable's open desires are to keep on running the LMD via re-election by the governing commission of mayors later this month and to take the PRSC presidential nomination.

(SBU) Aristy Castro faced a setback last February when the U.S. Embassy refused to renew his visa; his stateside attorney has been pressing to get a review of the decision. Amable suffered chest pains in December and at the urging of his physician and his friends, the Embassy obtained a waiver so as to allow him to travel to Miami for medical treatment.

(SBU) Back in the Dominican Republic now, Aristy Castro has crafted a deal with the PRD's Miguel Vargas Maldonado for PRD support in the LMD election, likely to be confirmed this week by vote of the PRD political committee. Would-be PRD candidate Alfredo Pacheco, a member of Vargas' campaign committee, accepted discipline and with full page ads withdrew his own candidacy for the post. Even so, Pacheco told the public in his ads that he believed that Aristy Castro was not the appropriate person to chair the LMD.

(SBU) Some speculate that Aristy might be looking for an opportunity to run as the vice presidential candidate of the PRD's Miguel Vargas Maldonado.

- - (SBU) Eduardo Estrella, the party's unsuccessful candidate in 2004, is admired by many as an honest, decent man who has almost no chance in the elections. Estrella opposed the 2006 alliance with the PRD but that does not seem to have advanced his PRSC prospects. He is quoted in the press from time to time, speaking sententious good sense.

- - (SBU) Luis Toral announced his presidential aspirations on October 12, 2006. His staff maintains an extensive campaign website at [www.luistoral.com](http://www.luistoral.com) that includes a countdown to the 2008 presidential inauguration (currently 576 days away). Toral, 49, an economist is a longtime PRSC insider, having served Balaguer on the presidential staff, as governor of the Central Bank, as minister without portfolio, and as campaign manager for Balaguer's final, unsuccessful

bid in 2000. Toral speaks regularly to party gatherings, usually with harsh criticisms of Fernandez and the PLD government. One disadvantage is that he has never won elective office, losing a nomination for mayor and a race for senator in 1998 in his hometown of Barahona. Former president Hipolito Mejia commented to the Ambassador, "Toral is very tough."

(SBU) Result expected: a strongly contested race between Aristy Castro and Toral; either might pull it off.

- - Drafted by Michael Meigs

13. (U) This report and extensive other material can be consulted on our SIPRNET site,  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo/>  
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